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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR HARRIMAN
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-82 POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DEATH OF MOHAMMAD ZAHIR SHAH - FORMER AFGHAN KING
AND FATHER OF THE NATION

¶1. (U) Summary: The Presidential Palace announced on Monday, July 23, that Mohammad Zahir Shah, the former King of Afghanistan has died. The funeral and burial ceremonies have been scheduled for Tuesday, July 24 from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Ambassador Wood will represent the USG at the funeral and has issued a press statement and condolence letter to President Karzai. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Zahir Shah's funeral is scheduled for Tuesday, July 24, from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. The Ambassador will represent the USG at the funeral and has issued a press statement (see text in para 4). Suggested language for press statements from President Bush and Secretary Rice have also been forwarded to the Department (SCA/A and SCA/PPD). The American flag at Embassy Kabul will be lowered during the three-day mourning period declared by President Karzai.

¶3. (U) Crowned in 1914, Mohammad Zahir Shah was the last king of Afghanistan, but spent three decades in exile in Italy beginning in 1973. Upon his return to Afghanistan in 2002, he stepped aside to make way for a democratically elected president. The 2004 Constitution bestowed him with the title "Father of the Nation," a position that will disappear with his death. Though not regarded as a particularly strong leader, Zahir Shah remained an important symbol of peace and unity in the country until his death. President Karzai shared a close personal relationship with the former King. Some 30,000 Afghans are reportedly expected to travel to Kabul to pay their last respects during the funeral.

¶4. (U) Text of press statement released by the Ambassador on Monday, July 23: "We are saddened to learn about the passing of Mohammad Zahir Shah, Former King and Father of the Nation, today in Afghanistan. The United States expresses its condolences to his family and to the people and government of Afghanistan. The United States reaffirms to the people of Afghanistan our commitment to Mohammad Zahir Shah's vision of a united, democratic, prosperous, and peaceful Afghanistan."
WOOD